



# Lenten

## Reflection Series

One Church, Many Voices

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## Third Sunday of Lent - March 7

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I was honored to be asked to share my reflections with you on what my Catholicism means to me particularly in light of the Easter promise. When asked, I said yes immediately. I did so because, in recent years, it has become clear to me that it is precisely the Easter promise that is the source of my most profound hope and source of sustenance in my life and in the work that I do every day.

I'm a psychologist and, as such, my days are defined by my encounter with the suffering of other human beings. Some of my patients come to me in great pain—their faces reveal the deep hurt caused them by their experience of living. Their broken relationships, their personal catastrophes, the poor choices they may have made, have left some with a broken spirit and wounded heart. Many come feeling as if lost in an arid wilderness or a dark wood, no longer knowing who they are or where to turn to find their way out. Being lost in the darkness sometimes leads to an impenetrable despair that, at times, engulfs both of us as we sit face to face in my office leaving little hope of either of us finding a way out.

In spite of the deep despair I may hear in the person's voice, however, I also often hear their faint and humble supplication through their tears and sadness: "Am I worthy enough to be healed; am I worthy enough to be loved?" And, in these questions, no matter how deeply buried or in how distorted a manner they may be asked, for me, are beacons of light that can illuminate the way and become wellsprings of hope for renewal and new beginnings. They become wellsprings of a hope for the possibility of transforming their pain and lost life into something more meaningful and more whole.

The encounter with my patients' suffering is not easy—sometimes it's overwhelming and terrifying. To hold onto hope for them when they see none, to battle the pull of their despair and not despair myself, to remain present to their dark night and to continue to search for the light of morning are constant struggles. In those moments, I too often feel blind, fragile, vulnerable, and lost.

But, as I've gotten older, I've come to understand very personally that rebirth can only come when we face the darkness of the night; and if we've been in that darkness ourselves, and have been able to find that tiny flickering light when it seemed there was none, then we no longer need to be afraid of the darkness for the light is always there. What I've come to understand in my work as a therapist and through the struggle of my own life is that the source of my strength in being with my patients and their suffering—to love in the face of doubt and fear—has little to do with my clinical training, my scientific knowledge or my intellectual abilities. It has everything to do, however, with my faith in the joy and hope of the Gospels. The life-giving beauty of the Easter message is that we human beings are not created for death but for rebirth; our journey doesn't have to end with the despair of the crucifixion but with the eternal possibility of new life. This knowledge sustains me everyday, it helps me find courage when I'm afraid, to love in spite of being hurt, and to work to accept forgiveness for all the imperfect ways that I may live my life. It also empowers me to offer forgiveness and therefore help reconcile in others that which has been lost or torn apart.

Finally, although each of us may live out our own passion and death in our own unique ways, my hope is that we don't stay stuck in the desolation and despair of that suffering, but that we allow the hope of The Resurrection to show us that there's more and that it may lead each of us to renew our commitments every morning and every evening both to ourselves and to each other. This is my prayer.

## Personal Reflection Questions

Lent is a time of self-examination and renewal. Consider using the reflection prompts below to help further your contemplation and open your mind and heart during the 40-day journey of Lent.

- **What does Easter mean to you in light of the Easter promise?**
- **Where do you find beacons of light that help illuminate your way and become wellsprings of hope for renewal and new beginnings?**